

Advisory Council on Companion Animal Welfare

Date: 4th March 2024

Venue: Backweston campus

Meeting Time: 14:00 – 16:00

Attendee's:

Seán O'Laoide (Chair), Eoin Ryan (DAFM), Mairead Conney (DAFM), Hana Scanlan (DAFM), Aiden Maguire (DAFM), Siobhan Mullan (UCD), Chris Conneely (Irish Blue Cross), Suzie Carley (Dogs Trust), Maureen Byrne (APDT). Conor Dowling (ISPCA), Alan Rossiter (Veterinary Ireland), Rory Breathnach (UCD).

Online: Pat Watt (DSPCA), Claire Meade (The Cat Hospital), Jim Stephens (IKC), Cyril Sullivan (ISPCA).

Apologies: Alan Walsh (DAFM), Mary McCarthy (DAFM).

Before the agenda started Sean Murray's replacement Mairead Cooney introduced herself to the group.

1. Minutes and Action points from previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

The action points of previous meeting were reviewed.

2. Update from Brachycephalic Group

The brachycephalic group are looking at getting all the individual organisations to agree on an overall message. One of the main focus points is the concept of innate health. The ICEC have a position statement and a press release due to go out shortly. It was suggested that ACCAW could get behind it by the individual member organisations supporting it.

IKC held a conference seminar on 4th February in relation to health and welfare for breeders. Dan O'Neill the Chairman of UK Brachycephalic Group attended and spoke on innate health, giving very positive feedback on IKC approach. Jim Stephens was invited to join ICEC as representative for IKC and a further stakeholder for Ireland.

Update on the screening programme, IKC signed the Respiratory Function Grading Scheme (RFG) agreement with Cambridge. Everywhere except the northwest is covered by a vet carrying out RFG testing. The IKC and Kennel Club UK are reviewing background documents and progressing well.

ACCAW can play a role in endorsing these approaches and support innate health. DAFM's potential role would be recommendations, endorsements, guidelines rather than legislation at the moment, but not ruling it out in the future. A proposal is going through the European Council on dog and cat identification and traceability which includes innate health. The European Commission are consulting with EFSA around animal welfare issues.

Looking at the statistics from the Kennel Club, the French bulldog and pug have dropped dramatically from previous years. The number of dachshunds being bred has risen fourfold in the last three years.

Action Point: When the website is up and running, we can put up any relevant links.

Action Point: ACCAW member organisations to consider supporting ICEC press release.

Action Point: IKC to circulate video links of Conferences from 2023 & 2024 and a paper from Dutch research on brachycephalics.

3. Electronic shock collars: submissions received via public consultation.

DAFM updated the group on the findings of the submissions to the public consultation. 388 submissions were received, with 61% in favour and 39% against. Note that some submissions were made by organisations and others by individuals. There were submissions from gun clubs and individual members and non-hunting groups. DAFM is to collate all the key points from both sides and produce a recommendation for the Minister. DAFM will also consider the publication of a summary of the submissions.

4. Surgical artificial insemination in dogs

IKC gave an update on their meeting. Surgical AI is banned under BFCI rules. In certain exceptions, AI would need to be backed up by a veterinary letter, otherwise it would not be accepted by IKC, which was in their 2023 submission. IKC noted other methods are less traumatic and they welcomed the public consultation.

Veterinary Ireland updated the group on the VCI public consultation. Recommendations are to be made at the next VCI council meeting on 14th March.

The Dogs Trust submission was discussed by the group on whether greyhound and dog welfare are separate or in ACCAWs remit. With the review of the membership and Terms of Reference for ACCAW due at the end of 2024 (three years after its establishment), the question of clarifying the scope of ACCAW can be addressed in that context.

5. Update on exotics sub-group

There has been one meeting to date. It was decided that zoos are well regulated at the moment. What the group will be looking at is privately held exotic pets, pet shops that sell them, exotic animal rescues or sanctuaries. It was agreed that legal regulation needs to be put in place, and recognised that this is a Programme for Government commitment. The next stage is to invite guest speakers to speak to the group. This will assist the group putting their recommendations forward.

The group will have to consider the EU's approach and will look for guidance on the exact definition of an exotic pet. The scope of the group needs to be decided, regarding the movement of exotic animals. Within the EU there seems to be traction towards the Positive List, with ACCAW considering narrowing the scope of the group and using the Positive List, however, zoos are not in favour of the Positive List.

DAFM informed the group of the legislative options available being The Code of Practice (COP) under The Animal Health and Welfare Act and the development of a COP on how to keep exotics, along with having an S.I. on exotics which is in the PFG. It was suggested to have responsible ownership guidelines and legal regulations. The ISPCA have used COP under the pet regulations, with the NPWS taking the same view as the zoos.

With the review of the Terms of Reference for the ACCAW due, the issue of clarifying the exact definition of a companion animal can be addressed.

Action Point: The exotics sub-group to research EuroFAWC findings and update members at the next ACCAW meeting.

6. Update on responsible cat ownership leaflet

Claire Meade put forward to Chair a cat sub-group, which was agreed by ACCAW. The sub-group could discuss the subject of cats and any documents circulated to the group along with online material. Members can contact Claire if they would like to join the sub-group.

7. Update on new ACCAW website

DAFM have acquired the domain name accaw.ie. DAFM officials met with the developers on the 28th of February, they have now secured a resource and are going to start developing the site, as per the prototype presented in December's ACCAW meeting. DAFM officials are due to meet the developers on the 19th of March for a progress update.

As it is a government website, the platform will be used for information and links on the relevant subjects ACCAW discussed and not for news articles.

8. Reasons for surrenders of dogs

Dog's Trust felt that the main reasons are unwanted dog behaviour; accommodation in the rental sector not allowing dogs; and thirdly owners not having enough time to spend with their dog. Looking to get more details on the third issue by setting up a process called IPETS. This helps Dog's Trust collect data properly and adequately. Cost isn't a reason for surrender but is a challenge and an issue for dog owners.

Blue Cross have started a waiting list to review numbers, regarding surrender dogs.

The ISPCA don't accept surrender dogs from the public; rather, their dogs are taken in based on a decision made by their inspectors, but numbers are rising. It's challenging for the ISPCA to accommodate the numbers and certain breeds coming in.

There was a discussion of the issues relating to the euthanasia of healthy dogs at the owners request. This is under discussion at the VCI.

UCD carried out work for a local authority regarding the welfare of dogs in their shelters and factors affecting adoptability with a view to improve same. The report is finalised and awaiting feedback. A potential finding could be the need for a staff network in local authorities and charities. The Working Dog Group might be more suited to look at this issue.

Action Point: IKC to circulate links in relation to supporting staff in animal welfare charity sector.

9. AOB

Eoin Ryan informed the members he is moving to a different division and that this will more than likely be his last ACCAW meeting. His replacement Mary McCarthy will be moving to Animal Welfare Division.

UCD update on the proposal for the joint proper representative survey in which ACCAW voted in favour of, can potentially go-ahead once finances and logistics be reviewed and the Brachycephalic Group has concluded.

Next Meeting: 6th June 2024, 14.00.

